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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 000205

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/MAG AND NEA/IR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/16/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SCUL](#) [KISL](#) [IR](#) [MO](#) [US](#)

SUBJECT: IRAN'S AMBASSADOR DEPARTS UNDER PRESSURE; EMBASSY
PREPARING TO CLOSE

REF: RABAT 0200

Classified By: A/DCM Craig Karp for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: MFA DG Azaroual confirmed to A/DCM March 13 that the Iranian ambassador had departed Rabat earlier in the week, and Iranian embassy staff are preparing for closure. Azaroual also confirmed that there were clear domestic political considerations involving legal Islamists, which also have come out in the press. Azaroual expressed satisfaction with and appreciation for his Minister's meeting with Secretary Clinton in Sharm el Sheikh as part of the North African Three. End summary.

¶2. (C) Foreign Ministry Director General for Multilateral (Arab and Islamic Affairs) Mohammed Azaroual confirmed to A/DCM March 13 that the Iranian Ambassador Wahid Ahmadi had left Morocco for Tehran March 11 on an official plane. The Ambassador had given some press interviews after the rupture of relations, and the MFA told him that he was no longer accredited and that to speak to the press would be inappropriate, Azaroual said. Ahmadi, a Kurd from Kermanshah was simultaneously a trained diplomat and a mullah. Some administrative personnel have been left behind to wind up affairs, but once that is done the Embassy will be vacated. Similarly, Moroccan staff in Tehran were preparing the Mission for closure in the very near future.

¶3. (C) Elaborating on the reasons for the rupture (reftel), Azaroual confirmed that Iranian contacts with political parties were a contributing cause, including a now prohibited party tied to the Belleraj case. As for the legal opposition Party of Justice and Development (PJD), its members who had gone to Iran were exploited by the Iranians, he said, and after the Gaza conference the GOI flew them to Sudan to show support for Bashir. Some PJD members had protested the rupture, but those in the center of the movement had backed the government, condemning Iran's efforts to undermine Moroccan Islam.

¶4. (C) Contradicting widespread speculation in the independent press, Azaroual said this was a carefully considered decision, and Morocco was prepared to live with the consequences for trade, which was strongly tilted in Iran's favor anyway. Iranian traders in Casablanca had been among the bearers of Shia doctrine here. Azaroual confirmed our suspicions (reftel) that the report from Lebanon on Morocco's commercial ties to Israel had come from Iran, passing a press release with the original information from the irib.ir website.

¶5. (C) Additional information appearing in the press, citing security sources, linked the rupture to Iranian contacts with mostly legal but more hard line domestic Islamists, such as al Adl wa Ihsane (Justice and Good Works Organization or

JCO). Media cited the movement's interest in clerical government and remarks by the leader's daughter, Nadia Yassine about an Islamic republic. (Comment: We will continue to follow developments and may next see al Adl in the government's crosshairs. End comment.)

¶6. (C) Azaroual, a participant in Secretary Clinton,s meeting with North African Ministers, said the Moroccan side was pleased with the meeting and with Secretary's interest. He would have liked to see both Libya and Mauritania present. He hoped the Secretary would remain engaged and visit Morocco soon.

¶7. (U) Local press reports as of March 16 that the imams have been preaching against Shia thinking. There are also reports that the Interior Ministry will be confiscating Shia materials. In his pre-departure interview, the Iranian Ambassador claimed he had delivered his government,s response to the GOM request for clarifications. Press commentators have either lined up solidly behind the decision to break relations or expressed general bafflement -- some even suggesting this may have been an impulsive decision out of character with the generally considered Moroccan diplomacy.

¶8. (C) Comment: This comes at a time of renewed Palace sensitivities over Gaza and an apparent uptick in interest in coordinating with the Arab monarchs and Egypt. We will continue to track closely this complex situation. End comment.

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